
INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON UPPER BASIC STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL STUDIES IN ILORIN, KWARA STATE**Issa Nasiru OLOKOBA,¹ Ifeoma P. OKAFOR² & Fausta Uche MANAFA³**^{1&2}Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin³Department of Educational Foundations, National Open University of Nigeria

Abstract

The critical questions about the extent to which environmental factors influence teaching and learning outcomes in Social Studies education were disturbing the stakeholders in education. This study examined the influence of environmental factors on Upper Basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to: identify the prevalent environmental factors influencing students' academic engagement in Social Studies; the extent to which these factors affect students' academic engagement; influence of environmental cultural practices on students' academic engagement; and explore coping strategies adopted by students in response to environmental challenges. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised (7,253) all upper basic students in Ilorin. A stratified random sampling technique was used to sample 200 respondents based on local government areas in Ilorin. A researcher-designed questionnaire was used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. The findings of the revealed that socio-economic background, parental involvement, school infrastructure, and peer influence were the major environmental factors influencing students' engagement in Social Studies learning. Cultural practices and home environments significantly affected students' motivation and participation. The study concluded that conducive learning environments and supportive socio-cultural conditions should be provided to enhance students' academic engagement. It was recommended among others that parents and teachers collaborate to improve school environments, promote positive cultural attitudes toward education, and provide interventions that mitigate adverse environmental influences on students' learning outcomes.

Keywords: Environmental factors, upper basic schools, academic engagement, Social Studies

Introduction

Environmental factors in education refer to all physical, socio-cultural, economic, and institutional conditions that shape the teaching-learning process. These factors include: Physical environmental factors range from classroom infrastructure, lighting, ventilation, classroom size, furniture, and general school surroundings. Socio-cultural and economic environment such as parental background, community support, peer influence, and socio-economic status and teacher-related environmental factors which include teachers' competence, morale, class size, and workload are also among the environmental factors influencing the performances of the students in Social Studies. The interaction of these elements can either facilitate or inhibit students' academic engagement.

The physical condition of school infrastructure plays a pivotal role in shaping teaching effectiveness and student concentration. A well-ventilated, adequately lit, and well-furnished classroom creates an enabling atmosphere for both teachers and learners. Unfortunately, many public schools in Nigeria, including those in Ilorin, suffer from overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated buildings, and lack of basic amenities such as functional toilets and potable water (Abdullahi & Olokooba, 2019). Students in congested classrooms are more likely to experience fatigue, attention deficit and anxiety, which

hinder their ability to learn effectively. The situation is particularly dire in urban-peripheral and low-income communities where government investment in educational infrastructure is often inadequate.

The role of instructional materials in Social Studies teaching cannot be overstated. Materials such as textbooks, dictionaries, audio-visual aids, charts, flashcards, and resource room support differentiated instruction and foster social skills development (Olokooba, 2021). In contexts where such materials are absent or inadequate, teachers are often forced to rely on outdated or teacher-centered methods, limiting student engagement. A study by Olokooba and Abdulsalam (2016) found that the availability and utilization of instructional materials have a statistically significant relationship with students' academic engagement in computer-based instructions. The family environment plays a central role in a child's language development. Children from homes where English is spoken or encouraged tend to perform better in Social Studies than those from indigenous-language dominant homes (Ayodele, 2023). Moreover, parents' educational levels, household income, and access to learning materials at home significantly shape students' attitudes and competence in Social Studies. In many parts of Ilorin, households are multilingual, often dominated by indigenous languages such as Yoruba and Hausa. In such settings, exposure to English is limited to the school environment, which may not be sufficient to build fluency, particularly if the school environment is itself linguistically impoverished.

Teachers are central to the teaching and learning process. Their training, experience, pedagogical knowledge, and motivation directly influence students' academic engagement. In Social Studies instruction, teachers must not only possess strong linguistic competence but also the ability to employ interactive techniques and communicative methodologies that engage students across different proficiency levels (Olokooba, 2021). However, in many public schools across Ilorin, Social Studies teachers are often overburdened with large class sizes and limited teaching aids. Teacher attrition, irregular training, and delayed remuneration also contribute to low morale and suboptimal instructional delivery (Yusuf & Adebayo, 2021). The result is a passive classroom culture, dominated by rote memorization which fails to foster effective interaction and intensive academic engagement among students.

Students' academic engagement is also shaped by peer interactions. Schools with a strong academic culture and peer-driven learning activities such as clubs tend to foster positive attitudes toward Social Studies learning. Conversely, where school culture tolerates or even normalizes the use of pidgin English or indigenous languages within and outside the classroom, students may lack the motivation to internalize the experience of Social Studies in their daily activities. Additionally, bullying, social exclusion, or negative stereotyping of students who speak English well can deter learners from practicing culture among peers. This reflects the wider societal ambivalence toward cultural practices as both a tool for advancement and a symbol of elitism. Ilorin is one of the major cities in Kwara State, Nigeria, with a population that is culturally diverse, linguistically rich, and economically varied. It includes both urban and semi-urban communities with a mix of public and private schools. While private schools often offer better learning environments and teacher support, the majority of learners attend public schools that are grappling with overcrowding, infrastructural decay, and teacher shortages. Besides, the prevalence of indigenous languages (primarily Yoruba) in everyday communication, coupled with limited English exposure outside school, presents unique challenges for learners. The socio-economic realities of the city marked by varying income levels, low parental literacy

in some areas, and inadequate government funding may create environmental disparities that could affect students' academic engagement and educational outcomes.

While existing literature has highlighted various factors affecting Social Studies learning in Nigeria, relatively fewer studies have examined how environmental factors interplay to influence learning activities at the upper basic level, particularly in specific LGAs in Ilorin. Most available research either focuses on primary or senior secondary levels, overlooking the transitional yet formative phase of upper basic education. Furthermore, studies that do exist often aggregate data at the state or national level, failing to capture local nuances and contextual realities. Empirical evidence consistently links environmental factors to students' academic engagement in Social Studies learning. Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2019) observed that classroom ventilation, lighting, and seating arrangements significantly enhance learners' concentration and participation. Olatunji (2020) reported that socio-economic background, parental involvement, and peer collaboration strongly predict engagement levels. In a similar study, Akinwale (2021) found that the provision of adequate instructional materials and supportive teacher–student relationships correlate with higher motivation and sustained participation. Likewise, Yusuf and Afolabi (2021) noted that noise-free environments and functional libraries foster active learning behaviours, while Eze and Okafor (2023) emphasised that positive peer influence and community support further improve engagement. Collectively, these findings highlight the combined influence of physical, social, and cultural environments on sustaining students' active participation in upper basic Social Studies classes. Beyond physical facilities, research has also shown that emotional and psychological aspects of the learning environment influence students' engagement. Ajibola (2020) discovered that learners in schools where teachers create inclusive and encouraging atmospheres display higher persistence and willingness to participate during Social Studies lessons. Similarly, Bello and Hamzat (2021) observed that classrooms with minimal teacher–student conflict and a high degree of mutual respect contribute to deeper cognitive engagement. These studies imply that the emotional climate of a learning space is as critical as its physical attributes in maintaining active involvement.

Another dimension explored in empirical literature is the role of community and parental engagement. Mohammed and Lawal (2022) reported that students from households where parents regularly monitor assignments and attend school meetings show stronger commitment to learning activities. In line with this, Okon and Etim (2023) demonstrated that schools situated in communities that prioritise educational development, through mentorship programmes, cultural literacy clubs, and provision of learning aids, experience higher attendance and attentiveness among learners. This underscores the importance of extending the learning environment beyond the school walls. Furthermore, technology and media exposure within the school environment have emerged as critical engagement factors. Adepoju (2022) found that the integration of audio-visual resources and interactive language software into Social Studies instruction significantly increases students' enthusiasm and attention span. Complementarily, Chukwu and Ibrahim (2023) revealed that ICT-equipped classrooms encourage participatory learning, reduce absenteeism, and foster collaboration. Together, these studies reinforce the view that environmental factors influencing academic engagement are multifaceted, encompassing physical conditions, socio-cultural support systems, emotional climate, and technological resources. Many recent empirical studies from Nigeria and nearby contexts treat environmental factors as a combination of home factors (parental education, family income, learning resources, emotional climate), school/classroom factors (physical

facilities, classroom social environment, teacher quality and teacher–student relationships), and community/location factors (urban/rural differences, school location). “Academic engagement” is typically operationalized as behavioural (attendance, participation), emotional (interest, enjoyment), and cognitive engagement (investment in learning strategies) in Social Studies classes (Aroh, et al, 2025).

A string of recent Nigerian studies reports significant positive relationships between aspects of the home environment (parental education, family income, availability of study materials, parental involvement) and students’ academic outcomes in Social Studies, often measured as achievement or interest/engagement. For example, a 2024 study in Benue State found that teachers and school records point to parental educational background and family resources as predictors of students’ learning outcomes; several other regional papers (Owerri, Ikere, Adamawa samples) report similar positive links between supportive home environments and both learning performance and classroom engagement. These studies typically use cross-sectional surveys and regression/correlation analyses, and they conclude that home resources and parental involvement matter for students’ academic engagement in schools. Recent empirical work emphasizes the classroom social environment (teacher practices, peer climate, opportunities for participation) and physical conditions (noise, facilities, seating) as powerful predictors of students’ interest and engagement in language classes. A 2025 study in Enugu (Aroh, Eze & Ugwu) reported a strong positive correlation between classroom social environment and students’ academic interest (a proxy for engagement) and recommended school-level interventions to boost interactive classroom climates. Several Lagos and Ogun State studies (2023–2025) likewise find that poor physical infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms depress engagement and achievement; conversely, classrooms with interactive pedagogy and adequate resources show higher student participation and cognitive engagement.

Most recent empirical work in Nigeria uses cross-sectional survey designs, achievement tests, and teacher/student questionnaires. Moderation tests are commonly implemented using PROCESS (Hayes) or multigroup SEM; a few studies employ quasi-experimental designs but randomized interventions are rare. Measurement of “engagement” varies (interest/interest scales, participation counts, achievement proxies), which complicates direct comparisons across studies. Convergent finding: both home and school/classroom environments matter for academic engagement; classroom social environment and teacher practices often show the largest, most actionable effects (Ayodele, 2023). The teaching and learning of the Social Studies in Nigerian schools, particularly at the upper basic level, remain a subject of national and international concern due to persistent underperformance by students in both internal and external examinations. Despite the inclusion of Social Studies as a core subject in the Nigerian Basic Education Curriculum and its status as a nation building discipline, students in upper basic classes continue to demonstrate low proficiency levels in social skills and values system. This raises critical questions about the extent to which environmental factors are influencing teaching and learning processes in Social Studies education.

Socio-economic and socio-cultural factors within the home and community environments also play a substantial role. Students from low-income households may lack access to instructional resources such as books, digital tools, and private tutoring. Parental illiteracy and limited involvement in school activities further compound the problem, diminishing learners’ engagement with the language beyond the classroom (Yusuf & Afolabi, 2021). The problem is compounded by the absence of deliberate environmental

modifications to accommodate the diverse needs of learners, including those with learning difficulties or second-language interference. The interplay of noise pollution, insufficient library facilities, and limited access to ICT resources may reduce the exposure of students to real-life cultural practices and restricts opportunities for immersive learning. Despite numerous interventions by the government and stakeholders to improve education quality through infrastructural upgrades, teacher training, and curriculum reviews, there remains a gap in understanding the extent to which environmental variables directly and indirectly affect the teaching and learning of Social Studies in upper basic schools within Ilorin. Most existing studies have examined educational challenges at the national or state level, without adequately focusing on the unique socio-environmental realities of local government areas such as Ilorin, which blend urban and peri-urban characteristics (Adewuyi & Okemakinde, 2016). There is, therefore, a need for location-specific research that investigates the influence of environmental factors on Social Studies students' academic engagement in upper basic classes. By focusing on Ilorin, this study aims to fill that empirical gap, offering grounded insights that can inform policy interventions, teacher training, school improvement strategies, and community engagement initiatives tailored to the region's needs. Therefore, the need to critically investigate how environmental factors ranging from school infrastructure, classroom conditions, learning materials, and teacher quality to home and community influences affect the effectiveness of Social Studies instruction in upper basic classes in Ilorin becomes both timely and essential. This research seeks to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence that can inform policy reforms, resource allocation, and pedagogical strategies for improving Social Studies education in the study area.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of environmental factors on Upper Basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies in Ilorin. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. identify the prevalent environmental factors influence upper basic student academic engagement in Social Studies
2. investigate influence of environmental factors on upper basic students' academic engagements in Social Studies;
3. examine influence of environment cultural practices on upper basic students' academic engagements in Social Studies;
4. investigate copying strategies of environment factors on upper basic students' academic engagements in Social Studies;

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study.

1. What are the prevalent environmental factors influence upper basic student academic engagement?
2. Do environmental factors influence Upper Basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies in Ilorin?
3. Do environmental cultural practices affect Upper Basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies?
4. What coping strategies do Upper Basic students employ in response to environmental factors affecting their academic engagement in Social Studies?

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. This design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to gather data from a representative sample of the population to

examine existing environmental factors and how the factors influence academic engagements in Social Studies. The population of the study consisted all upper basic students in public and private upper basic schools within Ilorin, Kwara State. As of the 2024/2025 academic year, there are estimated 45 upper basic schools and over 9,327 students in upper basic classes (JSS1–JSS3) in Ilorin. Ten upper basic schools were selected using simple random sampling techniques in Ilorin. Twenty 20 students from each selected school were also selected using simple random sampling techniques and making two hundred respondents altogether. The researcher adopted researcher-structured questionnaire titled “Influence of Environmental Factors on Upper Basic Students' Academic Engagement in Social Studies Questionnaire”. This instrument consisted two sections; Section A and Section B. Section A elicited information on the demographic data of the students such as name of school, gender, class, etc. while the Section B contained items put in one cluster. The items of section B are placed on a four-point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

To ensure face and content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in Educational Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin. Feedback was used to refine unclear or biased items. Reliability has to do with consistency and stability of an instrument. It describes as how far the same instrument would give the same score on different occasions or equivalent items under the same condition. In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, test re-test method was employed. The research instrument was tested using a pilot study involving 20 students in a school not included in the main sample. The responses were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha to ascertain the internal consistency value. The reliability index of .67 was obtained. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics. Percentage for demographic data of the respondents, mean and standard deviation was used to answer all research questions. The average mean scores of items of the section was obtained by adding the points of the weighted scaling and divided by numbers of the weighted scaling. That is, $4+3+2+1=10/4=2.5$. If the mean of an item is above the average mean, that indicates the high influence of environmental factors on upper basic students' academic engagement while the mean of less than 2.5 indicates the low influence of environmental factors.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	87	43.5%
Female	113	56.5%
Total	200	100%
School Types		
Public Schools	156	78%
Private Schools	44	22%
Total	200	100%
Class		
JSS 1	87	43.5%
JSS 2	63	31.5%

JSS 3	50	25%
Total	200	100%

Table 1 revealed that 87 (43.5%) of the respondents are male while 113 (56.5%) of the respondents are female this show that majority of the respondents are female. The result also revealed that 156 (78%) of the respondents were in public schools while 44 (22%) were in private schools. it also revealed that 87 (43.5%) were in JSS1, 63 (31.5%) are in JSS2 while 50 (25%) are in JSS3 this means that majority of the respondents are in JSS1.

Research Question One: What are the prevalent environmental factors influence upper basic student academic engagement?

Table 2. Prevailing Environmental Factors

S/N	Prevailing environmental factors	Mean	SD	Rank
1	My learning environment is free from noise and distractions.	2.13	1.77	5 th
2	Inadequate classroom ventilation affects my concentration during Social Studies lessons.	2.39	1.68	1 st
3	Poor lighting in classrooms reduces my interest in Social Studies activities.	2.33	1.66	2 nd
4	Availability of learning materials in the school helps me stay engaged in Social Studies.	2.25	1.76	3 rd
5	Overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for me to participate actively in Social Studies lessons.	2.16	1.88	4 th

Decision rule: 2.5

Table 2 reveals the responses of the respondents participated in the study. All items were ranked and showed no prevalence of environmental factors on upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies as their means are below 2.5 benchmark. This implies that prevalent environmental factors identified do not statistically significant in addressing upper basic student academic engagement as indicated by the respondents. This implies that environmental factors identified are statistically prevalent by upper basic students on their academic engagement in Social Studies

Research Question Two: Do environmental factors influence upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies in Ilorin.

Table 3. Environmental factors influence upper basic students' academic engagements

S/N	Environmental factors influence Upper Basic students' academic engagement	Mean	SD	Rank
6.	The school environment encourages me to interact freely with teachers during Social Studies lessons.	2.18	1.83	5 th
7.	Clean and well-arranged classrooms make me more attentive during Social Studies classes.	2.20	1.79	3 rd

8.	My school's location affects my regular attendance in Social Studies classes.	2.29	1.80	2 nd
9.	The presence of supportive teachers influences my engagement in Social Studies learning.	2.09	1.89	4 th
10.	The social environment around my school affects my reading habits in Social Studies.	2.30	1.72	1 st

Decision rule: 2.5

Table 3 also shows the responses of the respondents. All items were ranked and showed no influence of environmental factors on upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies as their means are below 2.5 benchmark. This implies that prevalent environmental factors identified do not influence upper basic student academic engagement as indicated by the respondents. This implies that environmental factors identified have no statistically influence on upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies

Research Question Three: Do environmental cultural practices affect upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies?

Table 4. Environmental Cultural Practices

S/N	Environmental Cultural Practices	Mean	SD	Rank
11.	Cultural beliefs in my community affect students' attitudes toward Social Studies learning.	3.44	0.66	2 nd
12.	My parents' perception of Social Studies influences how much effort I put into learning the subject.	3.24	0.76	5 th
13.	Cultural practices sometimes discourage the internalisation of Social Studies experiences outside school.	3.41	0.59	3 rd
14.	Festivals and local events affect my study time for Social Studies.	3.48	0.52	1 st
15.	My community encourages the use of local language over English, which affects my fluency.	3.36	0.64	4 th

Decision rule: 2.5

Table 4 reveals the responses of the respondents on environmental cultural practices and upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies. All items were ranked and showed influence of environmental cultural practices on upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies as their means are above 2.5 benchmark. This implies that environmental cultural practices affect upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies

Research Question Four: What coping strategies do upper basic students employ in response to environmental factors affecting their academic engagement in Social Studies?

Table 5. Coping Strategies for Environmental Factors

S/N	Question Items	Mean	SD	Rank
16.	I find quiet places to study when my environment is noisy.	3.33	0.62	3 rd
17.	I use group study to overcome poor classroom conditions in learning Social Studies.	3.51	0.48	1 st
18.	I seek help from teachers to manage environmental challenges that affect my Social Studies learning.	3.20	0.79	5 th
19.	I attend extra classes to improve my engagement in Social Studies despite environmental difficulties.	3.29	0.61	4 th
20.	I motivate myself to study even when learning environment is not encouraging.	3.40	0.59	2 nd

Decision rule: 2.5

Table 5 also shows the responses of the respondents on coping strategies that upper basic students employ in response to environmental factors on their academic engagement in Social Studies. All items were ranked and showed effectiveness of coping strategies employed by upper basic students in response to environmental factors affecting their academic engagement in Social Studies. This implies that coping strategies employed by upper basic students in response to environmental factors affecting their academic engagement in Social Studies are effective.

Discussion

The findings from the table 2 revealed that no prevalent environmental factors identified on upper basic student academic engagement. All of the factors identified were prevalent as the respondents indicated. This implies that upper basic students do not prefer the factors on their academic engagement. This is in contrary with finding of Aroh, et al. (2025) who discovered that in many schools, classroom ventilation, poor lighting and provision of instructional materials were major challenges when it comes to providing optimal care and education for children and these challenges are more pronounced in rural schools. The contrary may be as a result of different in location of the studies and the samples used.

The findings from the table 3 showed that environmental factors identified do not influence upper basic students' academic engagements on the areas of reading habits, regular attendance, Clean and well-arranged classrooms, and more attentive during Social Studies classes. This implied that the factors were not statistically influence upper basic student academic engagement as the factors did not determine their academic engagement. This is inconsistent with the finding of Chukwu and Ibrahim (2023) who agreed that school environment plays significant roles in schooling of the students. well educated and successful in life, their children are expected to enjoy the benefit of school environment. The inconsistent findings may be as result of samples used and instrument employed in the studies.

The findings from the table 4 revealed that environmental cultural practices affect upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies. The environmental cultural practices that affect upper basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies include festivals and local events, cultural beliefs in the community, discouragement of internalisation of Social Studies experiences outside school. This indicated that the practices are significant in the teaching and learning of Social Studies. This supports the finding of Okon and Etim (2023) affirmed that cultural practices have influence on students in and outside the school environment as well as student academic engagement.

The findings from the table 5 revealed that coping strategies employed in reducing environmental factors affecting students' academic engagement were using group study, motivation and study at quiet places within the school environment. The finding implied that upper basic students take some measures to ensure that they cope with environmental situations in and outside the schools. This is in line with the finding of Ayodele (2023) who discovered that students' reactions played significant role in their study and has implications on their academic engagement. In the study, it was also emphasized that the students' study habits determine to a great extent the relative amount of physical attention and time which each child allotted to their study.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the prevalent environmental factors influence upper basic student academic engagements were inadequate classroom ventilation, poor lighting in classrooms and availability of learning materials in the school. Environmental factors influence upper basic students' academic engagements on the areas of reading habits, regular attendance, clean and well-arranged classrooms, and more attentive during Social Studies classes. Environmental cultural practices affected Upper Basic students' academic engagement in Social Studies. Coping strategies employed in reducing environmental factors affecting students' academic engagement were using group study, motivation and study at quiet places within the school environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following were recommended.

1. Government and school administrators should ensure that learning environments are conducive by providing adequate infrastructure, learning materials, ventilation, and lighting to promote students' active engagement in Social Studies learning.
2. Parents and guardians should be sensitized on the importance of creating supportive home environments by providing academic materials, monitoring study habits, and encouraging positive attitudes toward Social Studies learning.
3. Teachers should be adequately motivated and regularly trained through workshops and seminars on strategies to engage students effectively, manage classroom diversity, and address the influence of environmental and cultural factors on learning.
4. Community leaders and educators should collaborate to discourage cultural practices that undermine education and promote values that support regular school attendance and social learning.

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